

THE **R. CRUMB** HANDBOOK

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*I'M NOT
HERE TO
BE
POLITE!*

**R. CRUMB
and
PETER
POPLASKI**

THE
R. CRUMB
HANDBOOK



YESSIR, EVERY
DRAWING A
MASTERPIECE!

CHECK
IT OUT!

THE **R. CRUMB** HANDBOOK

R. CRUMB
and
PETER
POPLASKI



UK £14.99
US \$25.00

The R. Crumb Handbook is a brand new take on the life, trials and ideas of one of the most influential cartoonists of the last 40 years. Wry, self-deprecating, and candid, this is an exceptionally revealing and unexpectedly moving visual biography. Crumb is thoughtful and enlightening, with insights into 20th century popular culture that are hilarious, challenging, and acidly satirical. He casts an unblinking eye onto the underbelly of modern life, an urban nightmare of human weakness, lust, terror, and cruelty, all seen through the comic lens of his satire. Simultaneously, he weaves in the surreal narrative of his personal evolution from his tormented childhood in the 1940s through to his coming of age as an artist in the psychedelic revolution of the 1960s. With over 50 personal photographs, and 300 images taken from his sketchbooks and comic books, as well as fine art from museums, *The R. Crumb Handbook* tells it like it is!

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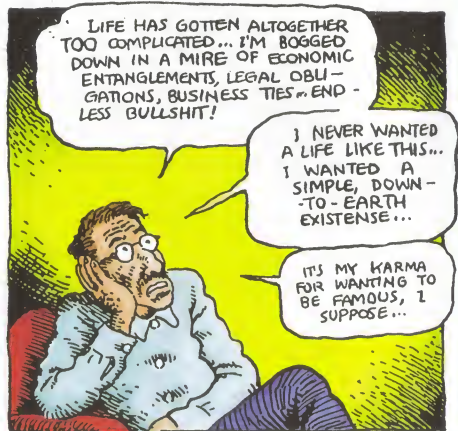
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R. Crumb's studio, south of France

Foreword

A Well Plowed Field

"I spend more time on business than I do on drawing, as the Crumb empire expands beyond my control," complained Robert Crumb, the bad boy cartoonist of the 1960s hippie culture whose work has recently been appropriated by the fine art establishment and placed in the "blue chip" category.

It was *apéritif* time in the beautiful south of France, 6:30 in the evening, and the great man stood over two neat piles of correspondence on the writing desk in the far corner of his studio. Next to the desk was a slanted glass top printer's light table with an unfinished drawing casually set aside. Crumb squinted at it momentarily before gesturing that I pour myself a glass from a bottle of *Domaine de Baubiac* and help myself to the potato chips in a blue ceramic bowl. The wine is intended for guests, for Crumb himself drinks only soda water mixed with ginger syrup.

Crumb's studio is a cozy, womb-like room which, like the entire house he shares with his wife and fellow artist Aline, is a universe of wacky knickknacks from past decades. It functions like a decompression chamber to keep the outside forces of the present at bay. The only two modern conveniences are the photocopier on the right by the door, and the telephone which, in the manner of telephones, suddenly rang. It was someone calling about Japanese toy designs of Crumb's cartoon characters.

THE GREAT MAN TELLS ALL!!
THE
CONFESSIONS
OF R. CRUMB



"Jeeziz," he muttered, as he hung up and launched into a self-mocking sales pitch. "We have the R. Crumb empire going ova here! I am a money maker on all levels. First, you have your entry level, which is the schlock: the stickers the kids can put on their notebooks, the bumper stickers, the patches and the badges, the cigarette lighters, the Mr. Natural incense ... We have all that happening big time, BIG TIME! All that shit. Up above that, we have the publishing empire! You got all the books, the comics, the commentaries, all coming out, like this Handbook, for instance. On the highest level, the museums are showing the original art, and the galleries are selling the original art for all the cake eaters! We have lots of action on that level ... a lot of shows. I got museum shows. I got auctions. Like that ... a lot happening for all levels of the culture."

He ended his tirade with outstretched arms, palms open, head bowed low. Was he putting me on? Or did he really feel he was being crucified? Probably a bit of both.

The purpose of my summons to Crumb's inner sanctum was to discuss the approach this volume should take. There were so many books about Robert Crumb out there already, the big question was, did the world really need another one? Was there really anything that the world at large didn't know about Crumb's life and loves? Was there any artwork out there that hadn't seen print in some collection? How could anyone get a fresh perspective on Crumb's life and work?

I'd gone through this process with Robert eight years before, and *The R. Crumb Coffee Table Art Book* was the result. My first reaction to this new challenge was "Oh no, not again!" But eight years can bring major changes in anyone's life, perhaps even more in an artist's. So we stood on our heads and meditated on the coming ordeal. "Terence McKenna says, you must always create media, never consume it," Robert said.

Personally, I thought too much blood was getting to his head. Anyway, we agreed that the influence of the media in people's lives might be an interesting point to stress. Viewing Crumb's life as a transformation from a "L.S." (Loser Schmuck) into a "C.I." (Cultural Icon) could even give readers a new way of assessing their own growth potential. And then, the use of the paradigm of the Toltec Indians' four enemies of man—fear, clarity, power and old age—would structure the book into four concise segments, giving the so-called "Dean of Underground Cartoonists" ample room to express his ideas and opinions, past and present.

When Crumb professed to be "*not a Star*," but "*... half a Star*," I had to remind Robert that most human beings forget 97% of what they learn, so the sordid details of some of his more outrageous adventures, which the general public is already familiar with, will seem new. Finally, the inclusion of a music CD of Robert's favorite tunes, played with various musicians over his thirty-year musical career, is the gilding that makes the whole damned package an irresistible monument.

"I want to give you a piece of advice about fame," the master said as we were about to begin the interviews. "You should get down on your knees and thank the baby Jesus every day that you are on your side of the microphone and not on mine. Think about it!"

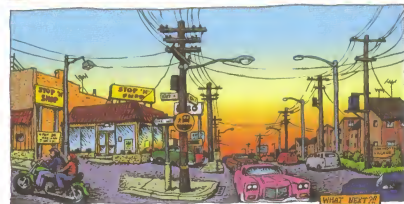
My tape recorder took down this initial statement for the benefit of the purchasers of this book, and the game was afoot. Still, I knew my old friend would rather be alone, playing one of the amazing 78 rpm records from his vast collection of 1920s dance band music. It is only his sense of duty to the hundreds of thousands of Crumb fans that drives him on. R. Crumb will never let his people down.

Peter Poplaski, 23 April 2004



R. Crumb, San Francisco, 1996





JAMES HOWARD KUNSTLER
WRITER AND COMMENTATOR

The spread of slums, the hypergrowth and congestion of manufacturing cities, the noise and stench of the industrial process, debased urban life all over the western world and led to a great yearning for escape ... in America, with its superabundance of cheap land, simple property laws, social mobility, mania for profit, zest for practical invention, and bible drunk sense of history, the yearning to escape industrialism expressed itself as a renewed search for Eden. America reinvented that paradise, described so briefly and vaguely in the book of Genesis, called it suburbia, and put it up for sale.

from The Geography Of Nowhere, 1993

